

Bright Comments on Legislation Passed by the House Before Adjournment

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, the House of Representatives passed several bills before adjourning until January 2010. Below are brief descriptions of each bill, followed by Congressman Bright's comments.

H.R. 3326, the Department of Defense Appropriations Act, appropriates financial resources for the military. Bright voted YES on the legislation and also supported the bill when it came for a vote before the House in July. Included in the bill is a 3.4% pay raise for the military, increased funding for medical care in the Department of Defense, money for training and improved military equipment, and funding for our operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The bill passed 395-34, earning the support of strong majorities in both parties.

Additionally, several policy provisions were included in this legislation, many of which are set to expire at the year. These include two month extensions of the Patriot Act, Medicare Physician Payments at the 2009 level, highway funding through the Department of Transportation, unemployment insurance benefits for jobless Americans, and COBRA health insurance benefits for the unemployed.

"As I have said in the past, I will always vote to support the troops," Bright said. "The bill passed today provides the necessary resources to our soldiers serving at home and overseas. Additionally, a 3.4% pay increase for service members is the least we can do to show our gratitude for their sacrifice to a nation involved in two wars overseas. The most important job we have as Members of Congress is to provide for our national defense, and as the strong bipartisan majority who voted for this bill indicates, this bill does effectively does that."

“Furthermore, H.R. 3326 contains important extensions of needed programs,” Bright continued. “In tough economic times, it is essential that programs such as unemployment insurance benefits and health insurance for jobless Americans are extended. Not only do these provide needed services to those most in need, but the money from unemployment insurance goes directly back into the economy. Other provisions included in this bill- especially the continuation of current reimbursement rate for doctors treating Medicare patients- must be extended before the end of the year or we risk severe consequences. I look forward to fully addressing these issues through the normal legislative process in 2010.”

H.R. 4314 increases the federal debt limit from \$12.104 trillion to \$12.394 trillion. It is expected to accommodate federal obligations for the next two or three months. The bill passed by a narrow 218-214 margin. Bright voted NO on the legislation.

“The national debt is a serious issue that will only worsen if Congress continues to increase the debt limit,” Bright said. “I understand the reasons behind increasing the debt limit, but we will never do anything to address the debt if one of the few mechanisms to effectively control new spending is continually bypassed. \$290 billion may seem insignificant in Washington, but it is an increase that I and most of my constituents simply cannot stomach. We are sent to Congress to make tough choices; I hope 2010 will be the year we get serious about addressing the national debt and stop passing this problem on to future generations.”

H.R. 2847, the Jobs for Main Street Act, spends \$154 billion on a new economic stimulus package. The bill appropriates funds for highway construction, mass transit, school construction, job retention for public sector workers, and longer-term extension of unemployment benefits and COBRA health insurance. Introduced last night, approximately half of H.R. 2847 is paid for with unused Troubled Asset Relief Program (bailout) funds, with the other half coming from borrowed funds. It passed by a narrow 217-212 margin. Congressman Bright voted NO on the legislation.

“Improving the economy and creating jobs are the most important issues to the American people and it should be a top priority for Congress,” Bright said. “When I travel across the district, I see first-hand the effect that 10% unemployment has on Alabama families. We must do something to help people get back to work. However, the solution to any problem is not to simply throw money at it. Unfortunately, the bill passed today appears to follow this failed approach. Furthermore, the Jobs for Main Street Act was introduced only last night, giving members little time to examine the merits of such an expensive bill.”

“Make no mistake about it: I want to support a jobs bill that will put unemployed Americans back to work,” Bright said. “However, we have to be smart and creative in what we pass on behalf of the American people. I do not have confidence that the bill Congress passed today will effectively create and grow jobs. When Members of Congress return in 2010, I hope we can sit down on a bipartisan basis and discuss and debate proposals that will truly help citizens struggling to make ends meet.”